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Title: The Minister of External Affairs made a statement regarding foreign policy related developments.

12.01 hrs.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): Sir, I rise to apprise the House of developments related to foreign policy since the conclusion of the Winter Session last December. During this inter-sessional period, the Government has made vigorous efforts to promote our objective of an external environment that enables India's accelerated development efforts and increases our strategic space.

The Prime Minister paid an official visit to the People's Republic of China, our largest neighbour, from 13 to 15 January, 2008. He was received with great warmth. The Prime Minister and Premier, Wen Jiabao signed a joint document on "A Shared Vision for the 21st Century between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China", that reflects the congruence of interests that we share on regional and international issues, and our willingness to work together in those areas. The Prime Minister also took up the issue of trans-border rivers. The first meeting of the Expert Level Mechanism was held in September, 2007. We have proposed to the Chinese side that we expand our cooperation in this area. We have also agreed to intensify high level exchanges with China. I will be visiting China this year and the Chinese Foreign Minister will also visit India. We will be holding the second annual defence dialogue as well as the second joint military exercise this year in an effort to continue deepening mutual understanding and trust between our Armed Forces. Our bilateral trade continues to show strong growth and both governments have revised the trade target to 60 billion dollars by 2010. Our Commerce Minister will visit China in April for the 8th meeting of the Joint Economic Group.

On the boundary question, during Prime Minister's visit, both sides positively appraised the work of the Special Representatives in seeking a mutually acceptable framework for a settlement that will be based on the Agreement on Guiding Principles and Political Parameters signed in April 2005. Both sides have also agreed to maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas.

The hon. Members are aware that Chinese officials have expressed regret at Prime Minister's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in end January, 2008. The Prime Minister's visit to Arunachal Pradesh was to assure our citizens that Government is mindful of their developmental needs, and is ready and willing to assist them through concrete projects. The fact that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India has been clearly conveyed to the Chinese side by the Government.

The hon. Members would also have followed the significant developments in Pakistan. India shared the anguish of the people of Pakistan at the tragic assassination of former Prime Minister, Mrs. Benazir Bhutto in a despicable terrorist act. We are gratified that, in the recent elections in Pakistan, the people of Pakistan were able to express their wishes clearly and in a democratic manner on their own future. India wishes to see Pakistan develop and prosper in a stable democratic order. The Government stands ready to resume the Composite Dialogue process as soon as a duly constituted Government is in place in Pakistan. It remains our hope that we would be able to resolve outstanding issues and build a mutually beneficial relationship with Pakistan in an atmosphere free of violence and terrorism.[R14]

The security situation in Afghanistan remains a concern to us, but will not be allowed to affect our commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction. We lost two of our personnel in a terrorist attack on a major road building project in Afghanistan in early January this year. Five of our personnel were also wounded in this attack, which also claimed the lives of twelve Afghan security persons. We extend our heartfelt condolences to all their families. The international community must stand firmly with President Karzai and his Government as they face up to the twin challenges of a major threat from terrorism in the form of the Taliban, and seek to build a democratic and pluralistic polity.

Nepal is undergoing a critical transition. After two postponements, Constituent Assembly elections are scheduled to be held on April 10, 2008. The elections will offer all Nepalese, including those in the *terai,* a chance to have a say in their own future. Government is committed to assist in every possible way Nepal's transition to a democratic, stable, peaceful and prosperous State.

India is closely monitoring developments in Sri Lanka and is concerned about the recent upsurge in the violence and conflict in that country. As hon. Members are aware, our policy towards Sri Lanka is based on the conviction that there is no

military solution to the conflict. The way forward lies in a peacefully negotiated political settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka acceptable to all communities, including the Tamils. The interests of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka are a matter of particular significance to us in our dealings with Sri Lanka. With this in mind, we have welcomed as a first step the declared intention of the Sri Lankan Government to fully implement the 13th Amendment. We are also fully conscious of the need to provide for the safety of our fishermen. While it is important for our fishermen to respect the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), especially keeping in mind the on-going operations in Sri Lanka, we have impressed on the Sri Lankan Navy to act with restraint and for our fishermen to be treated in a humane manner.

The Foreign Minister of Myanmar visited India in early January 2008 and briefed us on initiatives taken by the Myanmar Government for political reform and national reconciliation. Foreign Secretary also visited Myanmar in February 2008. Myanmar is India's close neighbour and a gateway to the ASEAN. We have emphasized to Myanmar that the process of national reconciliation should be broad-based to include all sections of society including Aung San Suu Kyi and the various ethnic groups. India fully supports the United Nation Secretary-General's good offices and his Special Envoy Mr. Ibrahim Gambari's mission to initiate a process of dialogue. At the bilateral level, co-operation in cross border infrastructure development projects, for providing better connectivity to the landlocked North-Eastern region of India is an important area of our relationship with Myanmar. Considering our common ethnic linkages and security considerations, it is essential for India to ensure that there is peace and stability in Myanmar during the period of its political reforms.

I chaired the 29th session of the SAARC Council of Ministers that was held in Delhi from 7-8 December, 2007. This session reviewed the progress made since the 14th Summit in April, 2007 to move SAARC from declaratory to implementation phase. We decided to operationalise immediately the SAARC Development Fund. Other decisions taken related to establishment of the South Asian University, the SAARC Food Bank and for promotion of physical connectivity.

Hon. Members are aware that in a *suo motu* statement made on 30th November, 2007, I had referred to the concerns expressed by hon. Members regarding the alleged harassment of participants of the rally organised by the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) in Kuala Lumpur on 25 November, 2007 and subsequent related matters. As conveyed to hon. Members on that occasion, Government remains deeply solicitous for the welfare of people of Indian origin living abroad. There is a large community of people of Indian origin in Malaysia who are citizens of that country. We have friendly relations with Malaysia and we are in touch with the Malaysian authorities in the matter. During our interactions with them, concerns expressed in India, including in Parliament, regarding developments pertaining to the Indian community in Malaysia have been suitably conveyed. [R15]

The Government[MSOffice16] has been deeply concerned about the recent events in Gaza and the West Bank. The hardship and misery caused by these developments is deplorable. We have indicated that India is ready to extend all possible assistance to help the people of Palestine to overcome the suffering they are facing.

There were significant visits from countries outside our immediate neighbourhood, which have helped in strengthening our relationship with these countries. The recent visit of Russian Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov to Delhi (12-13 February, 2008) contributed to strengthening the strategic partnership with Russia. During his visit to New Delhi, the Russian Prime Minister inaugurated the "Year of Russia in India", which will be followed by the "Year of India" in Russia next year. Prime Minister Gordon Brown of UK visited India (20-21 January, 2008) for the 4th India-UK annual summit. President Nicolas Sarkozy of France was the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations this year. This was the first visit by President Sarkozy to India and helped in deepening our strategic partnership. Our partnership with Japan continues to expand on the basis of the Road Map signed when the Prime Minister of Japan visited India in August last year. In recent conversations that Prime Minister and I have had with our new Japanese counterparts, they have expressed their desire to work towards further strengthening our bilateral relationship. President Gayoom of Maldives paid a state visit to India from February 6-12, 2008. India has provided economic and technical assistance to develop infrastructure facilities in Maldives in mutually identified areas including the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Male. The Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers of the Sultanate of Oman, Sayyid Fahad Bin Mahmoud Al Said, visited India last December, marking the first visit in a decade. I visited Oman in January, 2008. During this period, we also hosted visits from Prime Ministers of Denmark, Hungary and Greece.

Hon. Members would also be aware that we are currently engaged in negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency to arrive at an agreed text of an India-specific Safeguards Agreement. The conclusion of such an agreement will enable the Nuclear Suppliers' Group to amend its guidelines for civil nuclear commerce in favour of India. This will open the door to civil nuclear cooperation with various countries, including Russia, United States of America, France, UK, etc., with many of whom the necessary enabling bilateral agreements for such trade have been discussed and are in various stages of

finalisation. This development will signify, finally, an end to the unfair technology denial regimes and sanctions that India has been faced with for over three decades. We will continue to seek broad political consensus within the country to take forward our engagement on this issue with other countries.

In this context, Members' attention may have been drawn to some statements by United States officials regarding the applicability of the Hyde Act to Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation. Let me take this opportunity to reiterate that the Hyde Act is an enabling provi sion that is between the executive and the legislative organs of the United States Government. India's rights and obligations regarding civil nuclear cooperation with the United States arise only from the bilateral 123 Agreement that we have agreed upon with the United States.

To sum up, Sir, I would emphasise that the Government will continue its efforts to develop close political, social and economic relations with the countries of our region and with all the major powers of the world, so as to add to our ability to pursue our independent foreign policy as dictated by our national interest. (Placed in Library, See No. LT 8132/2008)

â€¦(व्यवधान)

मोहम्मद सलीम (कलकत्ता - उत्तर पूर्व) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, इस पर चर्चा होनी चाहिए।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : इस पर चर्चा होगी।

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